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TO THE PARISHIONERS

OF

**CHRIST'S CHURCH,**  
MONTREAL.

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*My Christian Friends,*

A TRACT intituled "Lent Usages," bearing the name of "The Rev. Capel Molyneux, B. A., incumbent of the Episcopal Chapel, Woolwich," as its author, and re-published here by the Incumbent of one of our Chapels, as I am credibly informed, has very recently been put into circulation for the instruction and edification of our Church Members generally. The object of its author is evidently to repudiate all stated days and seasons of fasting or abstinence, (especially the present season of Lent,) as serving "for the most part, to foster lamentable self-deception, and perilous delusion in regard to the soul's health and salvation;" and as tending to "the substitution of mere formalism for genuine religion;" and the effect apparently intended to be produced by its re-publisher, is to justify his own practice as differing from that which prevails in our Parish Church.

Believing this Tract to be subversive of the discipline of our Church, and destructive of true Christian practice, I feel it to be my duty to take such notice of it as the occasion seems to require, in order to guard you against both its schismatic tendency and spiritual delusion.

I shall consider the subject in two points of view : Firstly, the authority of the Church in respect of stated days and seasons of fasting or abstinence, in connection with the offices in the same Church of the author and re-publisher of the Tract—and secondly, the arguments adduced in support of their schismatic view of the subject.

It is provided by the 36th Canon of our Church that “no person shall be received into the Ministry, except he shall first subscribe to these Articles following :

1. The supremacy of the Sovereign, &c.
  2. That the Book of Common Prayer, and Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, containeth in it *nothing contrary to the Word of God*, and that it may lawfully be used, and that *he himself will use* the form in the said Book prescribed,” &c. &c.
  3. That he alloweth the Book of Articles of Religion agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops of both Provinces, and the whole Clergy, in the Convocation holden at London in the year 1562, and that he acknowledgeth all and every the Articles therein contained, being in number nine and thirty, besides the Ratification, to be agreeable to the Word of God.
- “Which subscription, as it seemeth by the same and following Canon, must be before the Bishop himself.

And for the avoiding of all ambiguities, such person shall subscribe in this form and order of words, setting down both his Christian and surname, viz: I. N. N., do willingly, and *ex animo*, subscribe to these three Articles above mentioned, and to all things that are contained in them.

“And if any Bishop shall ordain any, except he shall first have so subscribed, he shall be suspended from giving of Orders for the space of twelve months.”

In “the Ordering of Priests,” the Bishop asks the person to be ordained—“Will you give your faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine and sacraments, and the *discipline* of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, *and as this Church and realm* hath received the same?” &c. To which he answers—“I will do so by the help of the Lord.”

The Book of Common Prayer appoints the following days and seasons “of fasting, or abstinence:”

1. The forty days of Lent.
2. The Ember days at the four seasons.
3. The three Rogation days.
4. All the Fridays in the year except Christmas day.

The 35th Article says: “The Second Book of Homilies, the several titles whereof we have joined under this Article, doth contain a *godly* and *wholesome doctrine* \* \* \* \* as doth the former Book “of Homilies,” &c. One of “the titles,” here mentioned, is “of good works, first, of fasting,”—and in this Homily it is declared, not only that “the authority which Christ himself used (in respect of fasting) be left to the Church,” but that “to abstain from certain meats, at certain times, not because the meats are evil, but be-

cause they are not necessary, this abstinence is not evil, and to restrain the use of meats when time and necessity shall require, this doth properly pertain to Christian men."

But the author and re-publisher of the Tract under consideration, have made a solemn declaration, subscribed with their Christian and surname, that "the Book of Common Prayer containeth in it nothing contrary to the word of God," and that they themselves "will use the form in the said Book prescribed"—and yet they declare, that the observance of such days and seasons of fasting or abstinence, as are prescribed in that same Book of Common Prayer, does not accord with Scripture, "but is rather in direct opposition to it." The like observation applies with equal force with reference to their "subscription" to the 35th Article. I leave it to them to reconcile such a declaration to their own conscience—as they can; but it appears to my simple judgment, that they who impugn that discipline of the Church, which they have solemnly promised to maintain, subject themselves to the penalty imposed on such persons, by the 38th Canon of the Church:—"If any Minister, after having subscribed the three Articles of the 36th Canon, shall omit to use any of the *orders* and ceremonies prescribed in the Communion Book, he shall be suspended," &c., &c. "I do not see (says Archdeacon Sharp) how any man can, with a good conscience, continue acting as a Minister of our Church, who can allow himself either to depart from her doctrine, as expressed in her Articles, or from her rites and ceremonies, as prescribed in the Service Book."

2ndly.—I am to consider the arguments which they have adduced in support of this, their schismatic view of the subject.

One of the arguments urged, in the Tract, against the “observance of times and seasons” for fasting or abstinence, is the danger of its being mistaken “for vital godliness.” Indeed, it is assumed that most persons who observe those times and seasons, do so that “they may appear unto men to fast.” This argument proves too much—because it must be equally good against all forms of public worship, however simple they may be—nay, even against the whole visible Church. Therefore, according to the Tract, these must also be repudiated.

The Tract asserts there is no Scripture *command* to fast at all; but that Christians are left free to fast or not, as they please. “It is not (it is asserted) an absolute, not an essential duty; there is not a single injunction in the New Testament to that effect: we are nowhere *bidden* to fast. We are instructed how to act when we do fast; but whether we are to fast or not, is left to be determined by every man’s experience of its results.” This is truly a most notable interpretation of Our Saviour’s injunction: “*When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites,*” &c. According to the same mode of interpretation, the injunctions: “*When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven,*” &c. and “*When thou dost thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee,*” are mere instructions how we are to act *when* we pray and *when* we give alms—but whether we are to pray at all or give alms at all, is “left to be determined by every man’s experience of their results,”—



they are "not an essential duty." It is rather wonderful that this expositor of Scripture did not remember the *example* of Christ himself, in fasting forty days and forty nights, as a preparation for entering upon his ministry—and his connecting fasting with almsgiving and prayer,—nor his declaration to his Disciples that the working of miracles could come "only by fasting and prayer;" nor the fact that he excused his Disciples from fasting *so long as He*, "the Bridegroom was with them," because that *being a time of joy and gladness*, it would be *an improper season* for tokens of sorrow. But He clearly intimates, at the same time, that it would be their *duty* hereafter, for "the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then *they shall fast*." It is wonderful too that He did not remember the practice of the Apostles, as recorded in such passages as these: "As they ministered unto the Lord, and *fasted*,"—(Acts xiii. 2.) "and had prayed *with fasting*," (Acts xiv. 23.) "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that, by any means, when I had preached to others, I myself should be *a castaway*." (1 Cor. ix. 27.) Thus making the duty of fasting of more importance than preaching. "In watchings, in fastings," (2 Cor. vi. 5.) "In fastings often," (2 Cor. xi. 27.) nor the practice of the primitive Christians who were very constant and regular in the observance both of their *annual* and *weekly fasts*. "Their weekly fasts were Wednesdays and Fridays, because on the one Our Lord was betrayed, on the other crucified. The chief of their annual fasts was that of Lent, which they observed by way of preparation for their feast of Easter.

From the very first ages of Christianity, it was customary for the Christians to set apart some time for mortification and self-denial, to prepare themselves for the feast of Easter. Irenæus, who lived about ninety years from the death of St. John, and conversed familiarly with St. Polycarp, as Polycarp had with St. John, has happened to let us know, though incidentally, that as it was observed in his time, so it was in that of his predecessors."—(*Wheatly.*)

I shall conclude with the following quotation from Bishop Horne, which I do not doubt will be a sufficient and satisfactory answer to all that is said in the Tract against the propriety of abstaining, during the season of Lent, from customary worldly gratifications :

"In this hallowed season, the Church, by the voice of all her holy services, calleth the world to repentance from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. And, if ever there was an institution calculated to promote the glory of God, *by forwarding the salvation of man*, it is this appointment of *a certain set time* for all persons to consider their ways, to break off their sins, and to return from whence they have fallen through the infirmities of the flesh and the prevalence of temptation. For though most certain it is, that sorrow should be the constant attendant upon sin, and daily transgressions call for daily penitence, yet fatal experience convinces us of another truth, no less certain, that in a body so frail, and a world so corrupt, cares and pleasures soon oppress the heart, and insensibility brings on the slumbers of listlessness and negligence as to its spiritual concerns, which, unless dissipated and dispersed by frequently repeated admonitions, will



at length seal it up in the deep sleep of a final impenitence.

"It was wisely foreseen, that, should the sinner *be permitted to reserve to himself* the choice of 'a convenient season' wherein to turn from sin to righteousness, that 'convenient season' would never come; and *the specious plea of keeping every day holy alike*, would often be found to cover a design of keeping none holy at all. It seemed good therefore to the Church to fix a stated time, in which men might enter upon the great work of their repentance. And what time could have been selected with greater propriety than this 'Lenten' or spring season, when universal nature, awakening from her wintry sleep, and coming out of a state of deformity, and a course of penance, imposed for the transgression of man, her Lord and Master is about to rise from the dead; and putting on her garments of glory and beauty, to give us a kind of prelude to the renovation of all things? So that the whole creation most harmoniously accompanieth the voice of the Church, as that sweetly accordeth to the call of the Apostle, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'"

I am,

My Christian Friends,

Your faithful servant,

JOHN BETHUNE.

Montreal, 19th February, 1847.

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